

SHADOW REPORT SUBMISSION TO THE CEDAW COMMITTEE  
BY WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP ON BEHALF OF THE NGOS AT THE END OF THIS SUBMISSION  
IN REGARD TO THE NETHERLANDS REPORT CONSIDERATION AT THE 65<sup>TH</sup> SESSION (7 –  
11 MARCH 2016)  
THE SUBMISSION MAY BE POSTED ON THE CEDAW WEBSITE

## **Introduction**

In its concluding observations during the 45<sup>th</sup> session (18 January – 5 February) the CEDAW Committee congratulated the Netherlands for “the inclusion of funding for women’s rights organisations in its international assistance programme and for mainstreaming gender equality and women’s empowerment in all its development activities.”

We wish at the outset to acknowledge and appreciate the tremendous contribution of the Netherlands government to our work as women’s rights organisations, through its consistent advocacy for women’s rights and gender equality, for its previous funding programs for women’s rights organisations, - the MDG 3 and the FLOW 1 funds on women’s empowerment - and for a number of other funds in support of specific actions towards ending gender based violence etc.

It is therefore with very great concern that we have noted that ‘even’ the Netherlands, – which has been such a strong supporter of women’s rights actions and organisations, – seems to have left this course. In December 2015 the Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation announced that - notwithstanding an absolute increase of funding for women’s rights -, it has decided to reduce the number of recipients of the fund<sup>1</sup> to only nine, of which only two are women’s organisations and none from the global South.

In this report we wish to draw to the attention of the CEDAW Committee to our concerns of ‘reducing space and funding’ for women’s rights organisations, using the example of recent funding decision of the Netherlands. With this report we aim to share lessons learned, which may help to change course and encourage not only the Netherlands, but all donors, towards understanding the importance of strong, independent and locally rooted women’s rights organisations.

In this submission we provide a summary of our concerns. A detailed analysis is available as part of a collective appeal which has been submitted to the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, in which we have asked the Minister to consider remediation measures. We remain hopeful that the Netherlands will see the need for a renewed commitment to support for the women’s rights movements and will take necessary measures soon.

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<sup>1</sup> See outcomes of the second call for the Funding for Leadership Opportunities (FLOW-2 fund). The previous FLOW and MDG1 funds supported 30-55 women’s organisations, many of which are based in the global South

## Context

**Women's rights organisations are under financial stress:** The context of this report to Committee is the grim funding environment for women's rights organisations highlighted a.o. by AWID, which states in an article entitled *20 years of Shamefully Scarce Funding for Feminists and Women's Rights*: "For decades, the women's rights movement and women's rights organisations have been severely underfunded. AWID research in 2010 revealed that the median budget for 740 women's organizations all over the globe was a miserly US\$20,000. In the same year, as a point of reference, the income for Save the Children International and World Vision International was US\$1.442 billion and US\$2.611 billion respectively."<sup>2</sup>

AWID goes on to state that: "This is in spite of recent research which proves what feminists and activists have known for a long time—that *women's movements have been the key drivers defending women's human rights and gender justice worldwide.*"

Women Peacemakers Programme adds: "Direct access to funding is getting more difficult for women's organizations. This is due to donors' growing preference to channel funds via large organizations (including consultancies), which are capable of producing (multiple) grant proposals according to donors' demanding guidelines, as well as can absorb their rigorous reporting and auditing requirements. (...) All this is increasingly undermining women's organizations' and movements' direct access to funds. As such, the feminist principle of "access and control" is at risk, and with this, the existence of the "movers and shakers" that have put – and are keeping – the issue of gender/ women's rights/ UNSCR 1325 on the global policy agenda."<sup>3</sup>

These sentiments are echoed in Dutch Minister Ploumen and Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders' own letter to the House of Representatives in response to the MDG 3 Fund evaluation in which they stated: "The government will continue to offer targeted support to NGOs fighting for women's rights world- wide. *These organisations – and individual women's rights defenders- play a crucial role in getting women's rights on the agenda, promoting and monitoring them and pursuing any violations.* This empowers women and the organisations that represent them. Empowerment is a precondition for women's participation and leadership in politics, the economy and security... The FLOW fund is at the core of Dutch support for women's rights organisations worldwide."<sup>4</sup>

**Women's rights organisations require sustained support, including institutional capacity building:** The evaluation of the MDG 3 fund found that "Women's organisations, large and small, still have a role to play. *They have a good knowledge of local issues and not only play a role in lobbying and advocacy but also fill the gap resulting from lack of government responsiveness in areas like combating violence against women. Yet often these organisations face challenges of long term sustainability and require longer-term*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/20-years-shamefully-scarce-funding-feminists-and-womens-rights-movements#sthash.m7CnwqtT.dpuf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.womenpeacemakersprogram.org/assets/CMS/Resources/Reports/Policy-brief-CTM.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 13 November 2015 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bert Koenders, and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Co-operation, Lilianne Ploumen, to the House of Representatives on the "Gender Sense and Sensitivity" 2007-2014 policy review conducted by the Policy and Operations Evaluation department.

*assistance. Such support should focus more on building their institutional capacities instead of only conceiving of them as implementing bodies.”<sup>5</sup>*

Minister Ploumen and Koenders responded: “The Netherlands is unusual in earmarking funding for women’s rights. *Historically, improvements in the position and rights of women have been the work of the women’s movement.* Women’s rights organisations – which may include men as well as women – are our strategic partners in international and bilateral diplomacy.”

***Increasing concentration of power in development assistance and need to support independent women’s organisations in the global south:*** The 2015 Civicus *State of Civil Society* report, in warning against “short term and project focused funding that does not last long enough to achieve impact”, notes that “large established CSOs, which are good at speaking donor jargon, have pre-existing relations with donors, and are able to navigate complex application and reporting procedures, do better than smaller, emerging CSOs. *This reinforces power imbalances within civil society, and limits the potential for innovation.*”

“What is also striking in this year’s report are the links between civic space and resourcing trends. It is not surprising that domestic civil society does not have the capacity to defend itself against attacks on civic space if donors have systematically underinvested in local organisations. In my experience, the situation is particularly woeful when it comes to support for civil society platforms, the ‘scaffolding’ that helps strengthen civil society’s collective voice when it is threatened.”

The report specifically advocates the strengthening of women’s rights organisations in the global south: “The battle for gender and sexual rights is now partly one of denying the notion that there can be two different worlds for rights: one in the global north and another in the global south. *Activists in the global south need to be supported to show that demands for gender and sexual rights emanate from and are legitimate in their countries.*”<sup>6</sup>

***The SDGs and the role of the women’s movement in embedding gender in the post-2015 agenda:*** The AWID article notes that: “As the world commemorates the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Conference this year (2015), creates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and holds the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development, it is critical to remember that *real systemic impact for women’s rights needs significant resources.*” Minister Ploumen and Minister Koenders echoed this in their letter to parliament stating that: “The policy review comes at a fitting moment, in the year marking the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action and 15 years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The new Sustainable Development Goals, in which the importance of women’s rights and gender equality are deeply embedded, were adopted at the recent UN General Assembly.”

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<sup>5</sup> Gender sense and sensitivity: Policy Evaluation on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality 2007-2014

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.civicus.org/images/SOCS2015ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

We, representatives of the global women's movement, wish to place on record that *it is a result of our efforts, working night and day with limited resources, that women's rights and gender equality are now on the global agenda*, and that our work needs to be sustained.

**Women's rights organisations impact and transformational role.** Without going into all the details we note that unlike the previous Dutch funds MDG3 and FLOW 1, the FLOW 2 fund decision has made no link to its predecessors. The FLOW 2 funds are being dispersed to an almost totally new, small group of largely generalist, northern-based INGOs. None of the principal recipients of FLOW 2 are from a developing country. Even though a total of 35 proposals were of excellent quality according to the evaluators and could have been funded had an allocation key been applied, - as was done for the previous FLOW 1 fund – the selection committee decided to only fund the first nine, in full. This, as stated earlier, runs contrary to sound developmental and organisational principles, and to the concerned Minister's assertion, quoted earlier, that "*support for women's organisations, large or small, local or international, must be long-lasting and focused on strengthening capacity*".

An emphasis on transformation and enabling environment has been cited as one justification for the FLOW 2 funds going to a few large northern based IGOs in meetings with the Ministry by members of our group. Officials have argued that INGOs are the best placed to deliver transformative change. This is a contentious point when applied to women's rights, to which most progressive organisations pay lip service, but whose mainstreaming in reality is often superficial. Are large mainstream CSOs better placed to deliver an enabling environment for women's rights than women's rights organisations based in developing countries, working at the grassroots level, especially given the FLOW 2 emphasis on delivering results at *local and national level*?

We submit that organisations specialising in women's rights, and especially those based in the countries they serve, are best placed to do this. There is ample evidence, including from the Dutch Ministers' letter to parliament, of how it is women rights organisations that have driven the transformative agenda for gender justice, all the way up to the SDGs.

The argument forwarded by the Ministry in favour of dispersing large amounts to a few organisations is that this will reduce the costs of administering the funds. This consideration appears to have played an important role in the revising and interpretation of the rules of FLOW 2 to deliberately reduce the number of grantees.

At a political level, this move is an example of the trend highlighted in the CIVICUS *State of Civil Society 2015* report quoted earlier of falling aid levels at a global level (reduced number of countries receiving aid and a much reduced number of NGOs funded). This leads to big projects and consortia being favoured at the expense of small scale, often more sustainable, actions at grassroots level. It further breeds an unhealthy competition between INGOs and local NGOS, with the latter now compelled to review strategies and cut costs.

**Learning from the problems in the process:** Unlike most funders who have a two or even three stage process (concept, full proposal, due diligence) in the FLOW 2 process it was all or nothing. The application and 14 annexes took days if not weeks of the most senior management time to prepare. The UNWOMEN Fund for Gender Equality, a

comparable example, has a three stage process, with technical support offered to women's organisations that pass the concept stage. Even those who do not make it feel they have gained something in the process. FLOW-2 applications have cost under-resourced and stretched women's organisations dearly in precious time and resources, with no return either in funds received or capacity building. The example below from Saskia Brand's blog is illustrative of what all of us experienced in this process:

"I was able to closely observe the application process of one of the applicants. The staff of this North-African organisation started off with positive energy this past summer. They had spent the whole year working on their theory of change, as a network for women and peace. They had been very successful during the first FLOW grant and knew exactly what they wanted to do with FLOW 2. *Minister Ploumen wrote on her Facebook page that this was an organisation that deserved Dutch support.* Key staff of the organisation spent two full months on the application. My estimate is that it cost them about 150 days. A major investment that cost the organisation almost a hundred thousand euro! When it was announced that 265 applications had been submitted, the full scale of this dawned on me. Suppose that the average applicant had spent not 150, but 100 days on this process. This totals about 26,500 days or 120 years of someone's life: with costs between twelve and twenty million euros! These numbers already raised serious questions when the applicants still had high hopes. It was clear that an excessive amount of work had been done here for nothing."<sup>7</sup>

Brandt estimates that the total amount of wasted time on these applications to be 26,500 days or 120 years: a figure that we believe is quite realistic. Ironically, as the aim of "empower women and the organisations that represent them" this FLOW 2 process has instead been disempowering for the women's rights movement.

***The effects of the decision on women's organisations*** The most important reason for this report is the dire straits that dozens of women's organisations now find themselves in as a result of the FLOW 2 decisions, which was one of few remaining global funds for women's rights organisations. Here we share three illustrative examples of the effects of the FLOW 2 decision on women's organisations:

As the only women rights- based network in West Africa, **WiLDAF** works in 10 countries of the region. Thanks to MDG 3 and FLOW 1, WiLDAF has successfully lobbied for the integration of women's rights and gender perspectives in the new generation of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) agricultural policy that will benefit over 90 million women living in rural areas in the region. On the ground, WiLDAF works with 300 traditional leaders to change 18 major harmful and unequal socio-cultural and traditional practices that hinder women from enjoying their rights. WiLDAF also lobbies for 5000 women to get access to productive resources including lands in 208 communities in 6 countries. FLOW 1 has supported the activities of more than 150 women farmers. In 3 of the 6 countries, 94 women's cooperatives have built the capacity of 2,600 women.

Without follow up funding through FLOW 2, the progress which needs to be consolidated and amplified will experience an uncertain evolution, even a regression.

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<sup>7</sup> BLOG – Saskia Brand (MDF) evaluates the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) call for proposals and finds that too large of an investment is asked of organisations, with almost no one benefitting.

There will be a gap in the sub-region concerning women's rights since the very existence of the network is threatened by the lack of funding to pay staff salaries at regional level as well as in the countries. Available funding from other donors is for projects; not institutional support.

**Gender Links** is a regional NGO working in the fifteen countries of the Southern African Development Community where it has championed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, a unique sub-regional instrument that brings together all existing global commitments to gender equality and enhances these through targets and timeframes. The Protocol is an example of creating an enabling environment for women's rights as advocated by FLOW 2.

Apart from leading the alliance of over 40 NGOs formed around this Protocol now demanding that it be updated in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, GL has worked to achieve its targets on the ground in three areas aligned to FLOW priority areas – political decision-making, VAW, and economic empowerment. With support from MDG 3 and FLOW 1, GL has pioneered an innovative, integrated model for mainstreaming gender in 400 local councils covering 25% of the population of the region. This involves an enabling environment for political participation by women; a ten-stage process for achieving gender-responsive governance by localising the SADC Protocol, involving women and men; local action plans for ending VAW, and support by councils for economic empowerment of survivors of gender violence as part of a holistic approach to ending violence. This cutting edge work, presently being assessed as part of the FLOW 1 close out, is now in limbo, with limited project funding and no institutional funding to support and upscale it.

**Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)** is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women in the informal economy. Through MDG3 and FLOW grants, WIEGO has been able to support networks of women informal workers' organisations in accessing improved economic rights and political participation in developing countries. In 2013, after years of joint work, WIEGO promoted and supported the creation of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). The IDWF is the first global union federation to be led by women. It has sustainable processes in place with 58 affiliates in 46 countries representing over 400,000 domestic worker members. With the Ministry's support through MDG3/FLOW1, the IDWF, WIEGO and partners successfully campaigned for a domestic workers' convention at the International Labour Organization. With continued support, the IDWF has achieved improvements to labour legislation at local and national levels, proving its record of effective campaigns in organizing and advocacy. The resulting legal frameworks enshrine improved rights and protections for domestic workers, the majority of whom are women. These achievements are a direct result, and could only be possible, with the Ministry's support.

Under FLOW1, the WIEGO network also promoted greater economic rights and political participation of home-based workers. During project implementation, home-based workers made great strides in organizing internationally and gaining recognition, especially in 2015 when ILO's Recommendation 204 on transitioning from the informal to the formal economy was adopted through a long process of inclusive negotiations. Without follow-up and further funds, the momentum created by a network of over .5 million home-based workers is at risk. The women working at the bottom of global value chains will continue to face risks and rights deficits at

work, remaining almost entirely unrecognized, valued, or taken into account in urban planning and local economic development processes. Twelve (12) local project partners will have fewer opportunities to build their advocacy and negotiating capacity and will have greater difficulty to increase their participation in economic development processes, in leveraging support from governments and other key stakeholders, and in gaining economic rights and public services.

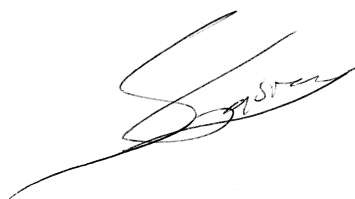
What these three examples illustrate is the long term nature of the kind of transformative change as well as the local know how and ability to work through networks that create multiplier effects that is a particular strength of women's organisations. The MDG 3 evaluation states unequivocally that, "*independent funding is still necessary for organisations working to achieve equal rights and opportunities for women and girls.*"

### **Next steps**

We urge the Committee to

- 1) Take up the issue of funding for women's rights at the CSW and highlight the importance of women's organisations to be consulted in the design of funds intended for their work. Capacity building and empowerment are key targets and end-results, whether or not women's organisations receive funding
- 2) Encourage the Netherlands government and other donors to consider recommitting to support for women's rights organisations

Respectfully,



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On behalf of the following organisations

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